

Philadelphia, PA – Days after the announcement of the members of the next administration's national security team, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) spoke about the special friendship between the United States and Israel and discussed his hopes for American involvement in contributing to the safety and prosperity of its strong ally in the Middle East. The Congressman made his remarks to more than 50 leaders of Greater Philadelphia Jewish community for a ceremony recognizing the Israel's new Consulate General Office at the corner of 19th Street and JFK Boulevard. —

“When I served in the White House as Director of Defense Policy, I saw the benefits of U.S. efforts to attempt to resolve conflicts around the world, including with Israel and the Palestinians,” said Congressman Sestak, who visited Israel numerous times during his 31 years in the Navy. “We need to take back the mantle of leadership because a safe and secure Israel is necessary not only for the people of Israel, but for the future of the democratic world.”

To summarize his view of the way in which America should approach its foreign affairs including its relationship with Israel, the Congressman referred to a teaching prompted by the Torah. Genesis refers to Abraham, the forefather of monotheistic faiths, as having become materially “rich.” The Hebrew word for rich (kaved) literally means “heavy or burdened,” as if to connote that for an honorable person and leader, such as Abraham, or for a great nation, such as the United States, great wealth brings with it great challenges.

“We have an obligation to use the United States’ economic and military power in a smart, prudent and responsible way that best serves the interests of our citizens and our allies,” said Congressman Sestak. “I look forward to the opportunity in the next Congress to work with the Administration to handle our foreign affairs in an accountable and bipartisan manner. This includes protecting Israel’s interests by taking the leadership role that is required – and that we have abdicated in so many instances throughout the world during the last eight years.”

In further expressing his views about U.S. policy in regard to Israel, the Congressman mentioned the importance of the topics he talked about earlier this year with Salai Meridor, the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, and Eli Marom, the Commander in Chief of the Israeli Navy. Their discussion touched on the mutual benefits of the economic partnership between the countries, which should include joint military ventures that not only provide greater interoperability between American and Israeli militaries – while driving down costs for procurement – but also greatly enhance the already strong relationship between these two countries.

"We must recognize, as great Jewish scholars have in the past, that genuine friendship is not easy," said Congressman Sestak. "I am taken by teachings of Prikei Avot, or Ethics of our Fathers, the tractate comprising ethical principles of rabbis from nearly 2000 years ago. Those great thinkers referred to dikduk chaverim – "the exactingness of friendship" – and the saying k'nei lecha chaver – meaning, "make for yourself a friend." Both of these phrases suggest that friendship entails hard work and requires courage to express one's beliefs and work out disagreements."

The Congressman referenced the story of Eddie Jacobson, an American Jew and friend of President Harry Truman from Truman's home state of Missouri. As many of the President's advisors advocated against the United Nations resolution recognizing Israel as a state, Jacobson wrote to the President: "I think I am one of the few who actually knows and realizes what terrible heavy burdens you are carrying on your shoulders during these hectic days. I should, therefore, be the last man to add to them; but I feel you will forgive me for doing so, because tens of thousands of lives depend on words from your mouth and heart... Harry, my people need help and I am appealing to you to help them." The United States would vote in favor of the resolution.

"I think contemporary Rabbi Steven Moskowitz has it right when he talks about this moving request by the President's friend," said Congressman Sestak. "In it we see what the Rabbi calls 'the power of friendship' to help us deal with difficult decisions and circumstances, but only when there exists an exceptional level respect for each other and the ability to share views candidly. This is how I envision the friendship between America and Israel as we approach the unprecedented challenges of our time."

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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